The Value of Ferrets on the Farm.

The feeding of rats is an enormous tax on the farmers of this whole country. If some means of destroying the entire rat tribe could be devised, it would add millions of dollars to the wealth of the world.

That is an impossibility, but the nuisance might be abated to a much greater degree than it is, if each one would do everything possible to rid their own premises of the vermin. A correspondent of the Inland Farmer finds that ferrets are very useful for this purpose. He says:

Ferrets are small, slim animals which are used for hunting rats, ground squirrels, rabbits and other burrowing animals. They are very useful to the farmer as they protect his grain and poultry from being destroyed by rats.

To hunt rats, liberate the ferrets where the rats are working. They will soon enter the rat holes. Be ready with clubs to kill the rats which make their escape from the ferrets. After the ferrets have hunted an hour or two, pick them up and put them in their pen. Give them a few such hunts and the rats will all leave. Ferrets make fine pets. They become as playful as kittens and can be carried in your pocket for chasing out rabbits.

They are easily cared for. A box, three feet by four feet put in a dry place makes a good home for a pair of them. Bread and milk is a good food for them. They eat almost anything a dog or cat will eat.

Ferrets are very prolific, usually raising two litters of young each year. These litters range in number from 5 to 12. There is a ready demand for these little animals, and they bring from $2.00 to $3.00 each, according to their age and the season of the year.

The experience of a correspondent of Wallace's Farmer, on the other hand, is just the reverse. He tried ferrets and was disgusted with them and found that rats suited his purpose much better. The difference was no doubt more in the men than in the animals. Here is his account:

Ferrets for Rats.

About a year ago we were completely overrun with rats, and, reading an advertisement of an Ohio firm breeding ferrets, we wrote them for prices on ferrets that they would recommend a rat-killer, stating that we wanted them for no other purpose. The price was $4.50 per pair and the express $1.00, making $5.50 which we invested. We received a circular giving full instructions for handling them.

First, we had to catch a number of half grown rats to let them practice on, by putting the ferrets in a box with the small rats. We purchased some wire traps and caught a number of rats, killing the larger ones and placing the smaller ones in the box with the ferrets, which they promptly killed, at each time giving the ferrets a larger rat until they could kill a full grown rat in a very short space of time. During this time we kept the ferrets in a cage and handled them several times a day, letting them out around the yard, always remaining with them and teaching them to come to us whenever we called them.

At last we decided to try them on the rats under the horse barn which is 40x50 feet, all floored with plank, making an excellent place for rats. In a few moments after putting them under the barn the rats began to come out. After awhile we called the ferrets, but as they did not "show up," we began a search for them, and found them on the opposite side of the barn, each eating a two-thirds grown chicken, which we took away from them, and again placed them under the barn. But they refused to hunt for rats further, and would return to the cage and endeavor to get in.

Result of the first trial, two dead chickens, no rats.

After this we shut the chickens up before letting the ferrets loose, letting them out every day for a nummer of days, but the rats seemed to prosper and multiply regardless of the ferrets; we could go to the barn almost any time and count from twenty to twenty-five rats.

On one occasion one of the ferrets left this excellent field of labor, went to one of the neighbor's and killed three chickens and one duck, for which we paid $1.25. After trying the ferrets for about three months and spending a great deal of time with them we decided they were not a success as rat-killers, and about this time they disappeared entirely. We learned afterwards that one was shot by a neighbor who lives about a mile from us, where the ferret had gone and was attempting to enter his chicken house.

Total result, no less rats; cost of ferrets, including chickens killed, $7.25.

We then went to town and began an inquiry for cats, and secured eleven. Six of them disappeared on turning them loose in the barn, but no doubt are doing good service in ridding the farm of field mice and gophers. The other five remained, and in a few days the rats began to grow scarce. We found dead ones lying all around the barns, and for a number of weeks we have not seen a rat. Two of the cats now have families, and they all live at the barns, where we feed them a little new milk twice a day.

We would suggest to those who are troubled with rats, that instead of buying ferrets, which are expensive, and which must be kept in a cage, and the cage cleaned every other day at least, that they get a number of cats (we do not believe that one, or even two, cats are sufficient to cope with a large bunch of rats), and we believe that in a short time they will not be troubled with what we consider one of the greatest pests on a farm.

Willow for Baskets and Furniture.

There is many an acre of land in this state, too wet for farming or gardening and which cannot be easily drained, that might be made profitable by the cultivation of basket willows. We found an article on this subject, in the Tribune Farmer, which we reproduce below:

The culture and manufacture of basket willow have not attained in the United States the degree of perfection and profit that mark the industry in Europe. This is for several reasons, the most important being the relative compensation of labor and the failure of the American grower to adopt the most improved methods. The growing, harvesting, care and manufacture of willow require manual labor, wholly unassisted by machinery. The cheap labor of Europe has grown willow and woven it into baskets at a profit impossible with us and our better paid labor. American ingenuity has still further complicated the issue by producing a cheap split wood basket to take the place of the more expensive and durable willow. Thus an industry of good possibilities is languishing.

The Bureau of Forestry has taken up the market and given it careful study. Its expert has thoroughly investigated the methods of culture and manufacture both in this country and in England, Germany and Holland. In addition, the bureau has established a willow plantation on the department's experimental grounds near Washington, where the best species of basket willow were set on different soils and placed in accordance with different methods of planting. The results of this research will shortly be made known by the bureau in a bulletin entitled "The Basket Willow."

The bureau's purpose was to discover a means of reducing the cost of the raw product, peeled and unpeeled willow rods, and also of improving the quality. This has been definitely ascertained. It is entirely a matter of properly regulating the distance between the sets in planting, care in cutting the crop of rods and in selecting better species and strains of willow. The custom has been to plant in rows three feet apart, spacing a foot in the rows between the sets. A far better plan is to put the rows only twenty inches apart and reduce the distance between the sets to nine inches. When this is done and the crop is cut close to the ground the roots will be longer and less branchy, the plants longer lived and the yield an acre much greater. The initial cost is slightly higher than under existing methods, but this is more than offset by the increased returns. At present an average production of six tons of green rods an acre is exceptional; by the method now advocated by the bureau eight or more tons an acre of better rods can be produced. When to improved methods of culture the advantages from a choice of better European varieties of willows for planting are added, the result will be a marked reduction in the price of the raw material and a distinct betterment of the condition of both the producer and manufacturer.

The growing of basket willows was introduced into the United States some sixty years ago by German basket makers who settled in Western New York and Pennsylvania. They first attempted to use wild willows, but soon abandoned these as impracticable and imported the purple or Welsh willow. They grew the rods, and the manufacture into baskets was made profitable by whole families engaging in the weaving. Their product has always been a cheap variety of basket, since they use steam in peeling the rods, which gives them an undesirable dark color. When the industry was extended further west and down to the Baltimore district, Maryland, hand peeled rods were used and a much higher grade basket manufactured. But this country, in the extensive use of willow ware, has never approached Europe, where are found not only heavy farm baskets and receptacles made of unpeeled willows, but market, clothes and fruit baskets of peeled willow, furniture, hampers and trunks, and artistically wrought split willow ware designed for countless other uses. Could all these be as cheaply manufactured here as there, their use by us would doubtless be as extensive as that across the sea. For willow ware is not only prettier than its substitutes, but, what is still more important, lighter and more durable.

Another use for willow in this country is found in the growing demand for willow furniture, which has become fashionable in the North, while in the warm climate of the South it is rapidly taking the place of upholstered furniture. Good wages can be paid in the manufacture of this kind of furniture. It is a profitable industry and steadily growing in importance, while willow basket making has barely held its own in the last decade. The demand for furniture material has been met up to this time chiefly by importing French rods. But this can be changed if our own willow growers will adopt more scientific methods of culture and market their rods only after they are well seasoned—not soon after cutting, as is now customary.

In the bulletin the bureau will issue every aspect of willow culture and manufacture is exhaustively treated. The character of the ground to be used, preliminary cultivation, planting, weeding and cultivation, cutting, sorting, peeling and packing, all are discussed thoroughly, and advice as to each branch of the work is clearly given. The virtues and defects of the different species of willows suited to basket manufacture are described. Inundation in the spring after harvest and before the new crop season opens is a new aid in protecting the holts from insects and in fertilizing the sets especially advised by the bureau.

A valuable part of the bulletin is a chapter on insects injurious to basket willows, prepared by the Bureau of Entomology. This not only describes the insect enemies of the willow, but also gives methods for their control. The bulletin should prove invaluable to all present producers and manufacturers of basket willow and of great interest to farmers who desire to add willow growing to their other crops. It can be obtained on application to the Forester, United States Department of Agriculture, Washington.

Florida Oranges and Grapefruit.

The Florida orange crop promises well this year, though it will be well below the great crops that used to be harvested in earlier seasons. Estimates of the yield for 1905 average 1,250,000 boxes, and much of the fruit has been sold on the trees on a basis of $1 per box. To many tastes there is no orange grown that compares with the product of Florida, that statement being particularly true of the fruit raised within the borders of the United States. California is our great orange producer, but though the fruit from that section is of fine quality, it does not equal the best of that which comes to us from the older source of supply, Florida. It is announced from Jacksonville that grapefruit are particularly good this year, the quality being exceptional and the quantity well up to the average. To some extent a taste for grapefruit is an acquired one. The high prices asked for it through a large part of the year limits consumption, so that it appeals to a far more constricted market than does the orange. The great bulk of the supply of these citrus fruits used in the United States comes from the far West, where, according to the reports of the railroads, more is to be shipped this season than ever before; but the Florida fruit easily bears comparison with that of California when measured by quality, if not by quantity.—Boston Transcrip.

Sharpes, Fla., Jan. 25, 1905.

Mr. E. O. Painter,

Dear Sir:

My fruit has never kept as well on the trees or as well en route to market. Trees bear well; scale is less than for years; not 15 boxes of russets in 500. No spraying done either. Oranges large 150 and 126.

Sincerely yours,

Geo. W. Holmes.

Prof. Gowell, of Maine Experiment Station, found, by trap-nests, two hens which laid 237 and 240 eggs respectively, while others hardly reached 100. Those prolific hens will form the basis of a future flock. But a smaller per cent of fertility is found in the eggs of such persistent layers. To get them to reproduce themselves, therefore, seting eggs may have to be taken at the most favorable season, and from the hens when they are in their prime.—Midland Farmer.